

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims

1-22 (Cancelled).

22. (Currently Amended) A method for improving plant growth characteristics, comprising increasing, in a monocotyledonous plant, expression of a nucleic acid encoding an NHX protein ~~and/or increasing activity of an NHX protein,~~, wherein said plant is grown under non-salt stress conditions.

23. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 22, wherein said increasing expression ~~and/or increasing activity~~ is affected by introducing and expressing in a plant a nucleic acid encoding an NHX protein or a homologue, derivative or active fragment thereof.

24. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 22, wherein said growth characteristic is increased yield/biomass and/or modified plant architecture.

25. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 24, wherein said increased yield/biomass and/or modified plant architecture is selected from the group consisting of: increased aboveground area, increased number of first panicles, increased plant height, increased total number of seeds, increased number of filled seeds, increased total seed weight, increased harvest index and increased thousand kernel weight, each relative to corresponding wild type plants grown under non-salt stress conditions.

26. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is in the sense orientation and is under the control of a tissue-specific promoter.

27. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is in the sense orientation and is under the control of a seed-specific promoter.

28. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is in the sense orientation and is under the control of an endosperm-specific promoter such as a prolamin promoter.

29. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is in the sense orientation and is under the control of a weak constitutive promoter such as a maize ubiquitin promoter minus first intron.

30. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is from a monocotyledonous plant from the family Poaceae.

31. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is from a monocotyledonous plant from the family Poaceae and from the genus *Oryza*.

32. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 22, wherein said nucleic acid is represented by SEQ ID NO: 1 or a portion thereof or a sequence capable of hybridizing therewith.

33. (Previously Presented) Plants obtainable by the method of claim 22, which plants have improved growth characteristics relative to corresponding wild type plants.

34-51 (Cancelled).